

## Are you a “MARTIAL ARTS” junkie?

Do you know learning too many techniques without the proper practice can be harmful to your health

Dear Fellow Martial Artist,

It was a miserable night, the howling northerly wind was so cold and biting it seemed to be trying to tear the coat right off my body. I knew I shouldn't be out this late in this part of town, but I had no choice. The show ran late, I'd missed the last bus and cabs didn't come round here after dark.

I could call a friend but it's so late. I'll walk, I'll be alright.

You see I'm a lover of the martial arts. I've always loved martial art movies, anything with Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan or Samo Hung are my favorites. Once I got hooked I had to give it a try, I loved it and the confidence that comes from doing it.

But I'm not your typical one style forever kind of guy, you see I believe in variety, after all it is the spice of life. So I've dipped into lots of different styles, you can never know too much right?

Well here I am, miles from home, walking down deserted streets, scared out of my mind, trying to blend in and look brave and confident all at the same time.

A noise, I look around quickly but see nothing.

Movement to my left, still nothing, is my mind playing tricks on me, probably. Oh man got to get out of here, I quicken my pace.

I feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise. I turn quickly my body ready to explode into action, but nothing. That's when it happened, a glancing blow, not enough to take me down, but it got my attention.

There were only two of them, average looking guys, so I wasn't too worried.

I took my stance and then they both charged me I had no time to react, which move should I use.

That was the last thought that went through my mind before I hit the ground. They were all over me, kicking and punching, then nothing.

How had this happened, I was stunned.

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I woke up a few minutes later, bruised and bloodied, no wallet or watch but thankful to be alive.

The worst thing was now I felt so helpless, a fraud, I had let myself and my heroes down. What would they have done?

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks... **PRACTICE**

## **How practicing one move 10,000 times is better than knowing 10,000 moves you practice only once**

The term 'practice makes perfect' is not only for those of us trying to pass our driving test. It really is important for us practicing martial artists too.

Just because you've read about, watched or practiced a technique with your mates a few times does not necessarily make you an expert in that technique.

You need to ask yourself, is this technique now automatic, no thought needed, a reflex action.

Your body will let you know through what scientists call muscle memory, and can only be gained through repetition.

## **Muscle Memory, HUH?**

Though the term used is muscle memory, it actually starts in the brain. When you learn something new, whether it's how to punch, kick or do a new joint lock technique, your brain fires up all the right motor units (nerves that signal muscle fibers to kick in) to help you perform the movements.

Once your brain has sent the memo to your muscle fibers and it has been received, they start sending messages back.

It's a continuous feedback loop from your brain to your muscles and back. "Your brain creates pathways through your central nervous system, and the movements then become automatic," says Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., fitness research director at Quincy College in Massachusetts. Those well-worn pathways essentially become your muscle memory.

The more regularly you use these pathways, the more your muscle memory gets to be a part of you, even if you slack off for a while.

No matter what the exercise the same rules apply, says Lee Hong, Ph.D., an assistant professor of kinesiology and neuroscience at Indiana University at Bloomington. "If you

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lay off an activity for too long, you'll get rusty, but those patterns are locked in. That's why, even after 10 or 20 years, you can get back on a bike and ride."

So your goal should be to practice your trade as often as possible, go through your forms, footwork, blocks, holds and strikes.

Every move should be an easy flowing movement without hesitation. A natural reaction when needed, applied seamlessly on demand.

Resist "*shiny new technique syndrome*" and ask yourself, have I practiced enough of what I need before I take on more of what I want.

Then and only then will you experience true enlightenment **Grasshopper**.

And hopefully you won't end up face down in the street, still trying to work out which move you should use to kick your attackers butt.

## **John Emmanuel**

John Emmanuel is a copywriter with a love for health, fitness and martial arts who has written for a range of companies including Belvoir Media Group (Harvard Medical School), Weiss Education, Healthy Back Institute and WingChunLife.com. He is a qualified Sport Therapist and coach in several sports.

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